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ABSTRACT

The pamphlet elaborates on the philosophy that the role of 4-H Club extension agents and volunteers is to help people to do things for themselves, rather than to do things for them. It presents brief discussions of 22 principles dealing generally with the importance of extension agents and volunteers in the operation of 4-H Clubs, the need for personal growth and development of all participants in the clubs, the need for individual consideration and clear role definition for volunteers, the need for learning goals for youth and volunteers to facilitate the implementation of learning experiences, the advantages of group participation, and the need for leadership development. (JR)

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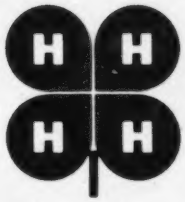

WHY VOLUNTEERS? A PHILOSOPHY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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NATIONAL 4-H VOLUNTEER
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WHY VOLUNTEERS? A PHILOSOPHY

Extension's role is not to do for people but to help people do for themselves. Based on this philosophy, Extension 4-H youth programs are set up through contracts between State Cooperative Extension Services and local governmental units. In turn, each State Extension Service is partially supported through a memorandum of agreement with the Extension Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The local contract specifies that the Land-Grant Institution will carry out such functions as employing, training, and supervising one or more Extension educators who will work in the local government unit. This educator's job is to develop and maintain a voluntary educational program for youth to maximize youth's opportunity for personal development through organization of local human and other resources. The local governing unit agrees to support the Extension staff in program development through appropriations for staff, travel and local office facilities.

The following principles further define this philosophy:

- Extension must continue to administer 4-H programs at the local level. 4-H youth programs belong to local people. Extension has pledged competent staff to guide these programs.

- Administration implies planning, preparation of volunteer staff, and facilitating -- not doing. An Extension youth worker's role should be to encourage adult and youth involvement in planning and implementing learning activities for themselves and others. The Extension agent is a manager, trainer, facilitator. Other people must provide the direct contact with youth. Volunteers -- adults and youth -- are essential to program implementation.

- Youth involved in Extension initiated and conducted education programs are 4-H participants. The 4-H emblem does not imply rigidity as to who can belong, what it means to belong, or what structure will be imposed. Nor does it limit the educational content of the learning experience.

- Youth and adults will participate in Extension educational programs they find important for them. People join in activities they see as valuable to them. If their experiences are satisfying and personally rewarding, they will be proud to be part of 4-H.

. Adults and older youth will assist in the 4-H program to the extent that they see possibilities for their own growth and development. Each sets his own goals. Leadership roles in 4-H make it possible for adults and older youth to develop their knowledge and skills in the areas of child and youth development, organization planning, and personal and group management. This experience helps them develop attitudes of community service and helpfulness to others. Adults learn that through 4-H they can help their own families.

. Each person (member, leader, staff) must be encouraged to grow and develop in usefulness to self and society. Extension is a developmental organization, continually working to improve learning-teaching systems to increase personal growth and development.

. "4-H Leader" is a title for volunteer adults and youth engaged in helping children and youth learn in 4-H learning groups (often called 4-H clubs). In recruiting and program expansion, Extension should talk with prospective volunteers about helping youth learn, and explain that people so engaged are called 4-H leaders. (Other terms than leader are being used to designate volunteers. Try terms such as advisor, helper, counselor, volunteer.)

. Large numbers of adults and youth are available to serve as volunteer leaders. They are capable and willing to plan and implement youth-centered programs if Extension staff will provide the framework and guidance.

. People will volunteer more readily when the task is specific and when they believe they can perform it competently.

The potential volunteer decides:

Do I believe I can do the job?
Do I believe I'm the one who should do the job?
Do I see personal benefit and satisfaction in performing the task?

. One Extension staff role is to prepare volunteers for their teaching-learning roles. Human development is the central teaching activity of the Extension staff (adult educator). This does not mean that Extension staff must be the direct teachers of leaders or planners. It does mean that Extension must arrange for the training and preparation of volunteers.

- Volunteers and paid staff can work efficiently in 4-H programs if their roles are clear. There must be a clear understanding that paid staff are enablers for volunteer leader development, professionally trained for the job and capable of drawing on the resources of the University. The paraprofessional is a supplement to the Extension professional, not a substitute for the volunteer.

- Each person -- youth, adult volunteer, paraprofessional and professional -- has unique, important functions. The Extension worker must lead in defining roles and manage the system so that each person's contribution is complemented by every other person in the system.

- The Extension staff should concentrate efforts on teaching volunteers, who in turn will teach 4-H members and other adults.

- Participants in the educational process (members and leaders) have or can be taught the ability to delineate learning goals appropriate for each member or group. People know what they want to learn but may not be able to arrange for learning or state what they want to learn in such a way that others can help them.

- Many important learning experiences can only be achieved in a group. In 4-H, one youth with a personally selected goal to learn a skill, body of knowledge, or way of thinking, assisted by someone else using Extension methodology, is a learning unit. This two-person group, however, is limited in learning opportunities. Learning must be accomplished in a larger group situation.

  Continuing learning groups are vital mechanisms for personal growth and development in citizenship, social skills, career exploration, democratic process, and assessment of personal worth to self and others. The group setting creates standards for performance.

- Youth and volunteers must establish specific agreed-upon learning goals. Often learning goals are not specific and verbalized unless someone helps the learner talk about them. Clear goals assist learning, give members and leaders a greater sense of purpose and motivations.

- An individual's sense of personal growth and achievement and encouragement from others important to him are the most powerful motivating forces known for continued learning. Leadership is, in part, assisting individuals with personal goal setting. In part, it's helping them see that others have similar goals. And, in part, it's helping them learn from one another, with a large portion of "keep up the good work" thrown in.

- Volunteer adults and youth have the ability to design and implement learning experiences (events and activities) once the goals are clear and resources and facilities are available. Goal setting with others is Extension's responsibility. Extension must help volunteers think through the resources, skills and tools necessary to help them secure these within their community. Extension must also help the volunteer system hook into and get resources from outside systems such as county, district, State and national Extension or support systems. This may include Extension's helping volunteers arrange for secretarial support, office space, postage, etc.

- Civic, religious and business organizations are anxious to assist with 4-H program development, if asked. Certain program needs are at the local learning group level and others are at the county, area, State and national level. The Extension staff and volunteers involved in the program must identify needed resources and decide how to contact potential cooperators.

- The Extension staff must help people develop systems that will make it possible for groups to learn from one another. Staff and volunteers can develop social systems that will assist learning in the smallest units and provide for sharing of these learning experiences in larger groups.

- One Extension worker can manage a program that reaches an unlimited number of youth. To do this, he or she must be willing to involve people in administrative roles where they can be directly involved in the design of the appropriate delivery systems for reaching youth.

The individual Extension worker was believed to be employed full time in the 1950's if the 4-H enrollment was 250 to 300 members. Analysts of the 1960's assigned the number at 750 to 1,000 per worker. Now, Extension staff have demonstrated that one staff member can manage programs involving two, three, or four thousand members and the complementing adult volunteer support system.

. Leadership development is an important goal for all 4-H groups. Every 4-H member must help the group set and reach goals. Extension staff must help 4-H leaders learn how to help youth develop as members-leaders. Members begin to learn leadership the day they join 4-H; first as observers of groups at work, second as participants in decision making and carrying out decisions of the groups. They learn to serve on committees, chair committees, and help others take leadership roles. The member, if guided in his leadership growth, soon learns more and more ways to help group work. He begins to develop a personal leadership style. With additional experience and development, the 4-H member may join other volunteer leaders in teaching and organizing groups.